
Letter from the Editor

The Evolution of Childbirth Educator to Perinatal Educator



Abstract

The field of childbirth education has been slowly expanding its base to that of perinatal education over the last decades. This is a call to define the scope of a comprehensive perinatal education program and the skills of a perinatal educator.

Journal of Perinatal Education, 9(1), vi-vii; *childbirth education, perinatal education*.

In this issue of *The Journal of Perinatal Education*, Elisabeth Bing shares with us some important parts of the story of the origin of childbirth education, as did Madame Cohen in the previous issue. Elisabeth Bing also points out that we have moved beyond only preparing expectant parents for the birth event. Indeed, the word *perinatal* in the name of this journal and the contents of this issue alone speaks to our involvement in exercise throughout the childbearing year, the support of breastfeeding, and transition to parenthood.

The evolution of childbirth education to perinatal education has been a steady movement over many years. In 1983 and 1985, respectively, ASPO/Lamaze published two edited books based on the contents of what was called the Childbirth Institute programs held in conjunction with the organization's conventions. The books were entitled *Expanding Horizons for Childbirth Educators* and *Expanding Horizons for Childbirth Educators: The Step Beyond*. These books featured articles on topics such as exercise in pregnancy and building support systems during pregnancy. There was even an article on using the same skills that prepare one for birth to help someone prepare for death. *The Journal of Perinatal Education* was named and begun in 1992 and has always published articles related to education of parents throughout the childbearing year. In 1995, Lamaze International launched its Advanced Skills Series for childbirth educators, which began with labor support specialist. Later, breastfeeding support and teen pregnancy support skills were added. Thus, while childbirth preparation and labor support remain our foundation, clear evidence suggests that during the later part of the last century—in a slow, gentle fashion—childbirth educators were called upon to become perinatal educators, the latter being a broader concept.

In this century, is it now time to develop standard definitions of the scope of perinatal education programs and the perinatal educators' preparation, roles, and functions? In this issue, Viola Polomeno talks of broadening the base of perinatal education to include transition to parenthood, relational skills, family health promotion, and enrichment of marital intimacy and sexuality. Roger Hammer and colleagues give guidelines for including

exercise throughout the childbearing year. Elisabeth Bing speaks in this issue of our widened horizons, including breastfeeding, postpartum, and parenting. Similarly, there are also perinatal courses that focus on other family members such as grandparents or siblings. The perinatal program that offers a full array of courses needs instructors with a broad variety of skills and knowledge. The perinatal educator who can individually cover this broad scope needs preparation far beyond that of the entering childbirth educator.

In the last half of the 20th century, we worked together

to build on the efforts of our pioneers to make childbirth education a common expectation for pregnant couples. It's value is now recognized in the Healthy People 2010 goals for the United States. Even sooner than 2010, let's set a goal at Lamaze International to comprehensively define the scope of perinatal programs and the skills of perinatal educators. This can guide us in our work to promote normal, healthy, and fulfilling childbearing experiences.

—Sharron S. Humenick, RN, PhD, FAAN